Annual Summer meeting of the American Society for Political Methodology 2008
University of Michigan – Ann Arbor

Do Neighbourhoods matter for Social Connectedness? A Belgian Case-study

Steven Lannoo
PhD-student
Ghent Institute for Political Studies

Abstract

From a positive view on social connectedness, scientists as well as policy makers have recently shown a large interest in social ties and norms of reciprocity and trust. In this study we develop a peculiar conceptualisation of social connectedness that is based on the literature on social capital, inclusion/exclusion and social cohesion. Our main focus is to investigate whether neighbourhoods can account for differences in social connectedness, and whether these differences can be explained by the availability of basic facilities in the neighbourhood. Our analysis is based on data gathered from the Quality of Life-survey of Ghent (Belgium) [11] during the year 2006 (n=1756). Only for two dimensions of connectedness significant differences at the neighbourhood level can be found, but facilities can not explain these differences. Some individual-level variables seem to determine more of the variance. Implications of the findings for both policy and research are discussed.[2]

1. BACKGROUND

The importance that recently has been attached to social connectedness originates from the idea that social ties and norms of reciprocity and trust generate a lot of advantages for the wider society (Coffé & Geys 2006). Nevertheless, social connectedness can also have a dark side. As Narayan (1999, p.10) states it: "the same ties that bind also exclude". Strong connections

[1] We would like to express our gratitude towards the city of Ghent for putting the data at our disposal.
[2] The paper is a work in progress. Remarks or questions can be send to Steven.Lannoo@Ugent.be.

between people can restrict their individual freedom, might lead to strong social control and prohibit people to rise against existing inequalities and oppression. However, in the literature social connectedness most frequently is associated with positive effects. People who participate very actively in social activities, also seem to have higher rates of political participation (Van Deth, 1992). Those who are better integrated in society seem to have lower rates of ethnocentrism (Jakobs et. al. 2001). Social connections have been associated with better health (Latkin & Curry 2003, Cattell 2001), economic development (Woolcock 1998), and so on. Perhaps most significant of all, social integration seems to be the most important predictor of subjective well-being (Verlet & Devos, forthcomming). In other words, being well connected socially makes people happy. This is not surprising, since people are first of all social beings. Therefore, they want to interact with other people. When they can not, they start feeling unhappy, angry or unhealthy. Despite the fact that strong social connections can sometimes limit people's freedom, we must look at those connections as positive things. For being free but socially atomised can only to very few people be a satisfactory state of affairs.

Because many scientist and politicians agree on the idea that social capital is a positive thing, they seek for ways to improve the amount of social connectedness in our society. For that reason it is important to know why some people are better integrated in society than others. This study's principle aim is to investigate whether the living environment of people can have an influence on their social connections. The reason we concentrate on this is twofold. First of all, the living environment is something policy makers (such as urban planners, local governments, etc.) can possibly have an important influence on. Second, in the literature it isn't very clear whether and how this living environment can influence social connectedness. The scientific information which is gathered in this way should help governments and social organisations that try to foster social connectedness in our society.

In what follows we first explore the nature of the concept of social connectedness, after which we briefly look into what the literature can tell us about the different elements that can predict levels of connectedness. Before starting the analysis we address some methodological issues concerning the investigation of neighbourhood effects. After the analysis the implications of our findings are discussed.

2. SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS AS A CONCEPT

Social connectedness as a concept is related to the ideas of social capital, social cohesion and social inclusion. It deals with the relations that exists between people, their attitudes towards society and the level of their participation in social life. Following Timpone (1998) we can define social connectedness as *the intensity of the relationship between the individual and his or her wider social environment.*

In a contemporary view of poverty social inclusion/exclusion has gained an important position. The concept fits in with the broader vision on deprivation that recently broke trough in both research and policy. In this vision, poor people are not only confronted with financial problems, but are seen as the victims of a wider socio-cultural subordination. Social exclusion can be seen as the *process* that restrains people from taking part in the mainstream society (Abrahamson

2006). From the viewpoint of the individual, exclusion can be seen as a *condition*, i.e. the situation of rupture of the bond with society. As a result, the excluded is no longer capable of building significant social relationships en participate positively in society (Silver 2007).

As we have shown, social exclusion deals with broader issues than pure financial deprivation. Still, most scholars of exclusion concentrate on economics. The impossibility to participate in production (i.e. unemployment) and consumption (i.e. low income) are the dominant indicators. Less attention goes to exclusion from social relations and activities, the feeling not to be a full member of society etc. (Levitas 2006). The non-economical element of social exclusion could be called *social connectedness*.

When we talk about social networks, relationships and attitudes towards society, we are dealing with the tradition of the social capital literature. The modern use of social capital can be traced back to the writings of Bourdieu (1980, 1986) and Coleman[3] (1988, 1990) and became especially popular with the work of Robert Putnam (1993, 1995, 2000). The quantity of the literature on social capital is enormous, as is the amount of approaches used to deal with it. An important point of discussion is whether social capital can be seen as an attribute of individuals or of larger aggregates (Nieminen et. al. 2008). Authors such as Bourdieu, Portes (1998), and to a lesser extent Coleman, see social capital as a resource an individual can use for it's own benefit. Other authors like Putnam, Fukuyama (1995) and Hooghe (2000) have the tendency to consider social capital as a kind of a public good: it benefits all people in society, whether they contribute to it's construction or not. Authors such as Portes note that social capital can also have negative implications, and addresses the issue of the unequal distribution of this resource in society. In the Putnam-tradition, the connotation of social capital is predominately positive. Some authors see the concept as the addition of networks, norms and attitudes and use a kind of an index to measure it (Putnam 2000), some put the emphasis more strongly on one component (Stolle 1999, Decoster 2001), while others stress the multidimensionality and look for relations between the differt constituencies (Newton 1999).

Our conceptualisation of social connectedness could be situated within the social capital literature. Still, we choose not to use the word *social capital*, and this for a number of reasons. First of all, we are convinced social capital is a concept that has been used so often in so many different conceptualisations and approaches, that is has become an *empty box*, meaning everything and therefore nothing. Second, social capital is for us in essence a form of *capital*. It is there because it is productive, whether it be to find a job, bolster democratic progress, or solve collective action problems (Decoster 2001). Our research-focus is not on resources that produce certain valued outcomes, but on elements of social exclusion. Because social capital is something productive, it should be defined by the elements that produce certain advantages. Social connectedness is in our view a *right of an individual*, and can therefore not be defined in such a narrow way.

Although we choose not to use the term social capital, we can still situate our position in the discussion outlined above. We clearly see social connectedness as an attribute of an individual,

[3] Both authors, so it would appear, didn't know about each others work.

and therefore take a micro-perspective. The notion of social connectedness as a right of an individual indicates a positive inclination towards the concept, but simultaneously points to the possible drawback of an unequal distribution in society. Finally, as we are convinced the bond between individual and society expresses itself in many different ways, we take a stand for the idea of social connectedness as a multidimensional concept.

3. CORRELATES OF SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS

Some individual level factors, such as TV-viewing habits, religious or philosophical involvement, age, education (Hooghe 1999), work conditions (Vézina et. al. 2004, Lindström 2006) have been identified as accounting for a part of the variance in social connectedness. Next to individual indicators, attention has also been given to the effect of the living environment. Some scholars have urged the idea that the living environment of people can have an influence on their integration in society (e.g. Hart & Dekker 2003). Within the tradition of the Chicago School, differences in levels of trust, shared values etc. are explained by a concentration of neighbourhood disadvantage, such as poverty, unemployment and cultural heterogeneity. For Flanders, Coffé & Geys (2006) have shown that heterogeneous communes have lower rates of social capital.

Another neighbourhood characteristic that could account for differences in social capital is the amount and quality of facilities located in the neighbourhood. Epidemiologists have find evidence that the presence of sport facilities, public parks or other local facilities in a neighbourhood stimulate the physical activity of the inhabitants (Cohen et. al. 2007, Booth et. al. 2000). When people live near parks they go more often for a walk, when they live near a pool, they go more often for a swim, and when local shops are at walking distance they more often leave the car ad home en go to the shop by foot. The possibility exists that the presence of facilities might increase the opportunity for people to participate in social activities. Those facilities might 'provide informal meeting places, outside home and work, where social relationships can be formed and maintained' (Witten et. al. 2000). In research on social connectedness hasn't been addressed a lot. One of the few exceptions is the study of Bowling & Stafford (2007) who found the perceived presence facilities to positively influence the social functioning of older people. In our study we will investigate whether differences in the (perceived) presence of basic facilities can explain differences in social connectedness for the entire population.

4. MEASSURING NEIGHBOURHOOD EFFECTS: SOME METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

4.1 Respondents in neighbourhoods: violation of independence of observations

In the theoretical problem described above, we are dealing with variables measured at different levels. In our vision, social connectedness is an attribute of an individual. The presence of neighbourhood facilities is an attribute of neighbourhoods. Therefore we are dealing with two levels in our sample: the first level is that of the respondents, the second that of the neighbourhoods.

Ordinary Least Squares regression assumes that all observations are independent from one another. When our observations are individuals nested in neighbourhoods, this assumption tends to be violated. People in neighbourhoods might know each other, often neighbourhoods attract people with a common Socio-economic status, etc. When observations are independent, scores on a variable for one observation tell us nothing about the score on that same variable for another observation. (Cohen et. al. 2003). In more statistical terms: the average correlation between variables measured on residents of the same neighbourhood can not be higher than the overall correlation. In hierarchical datasets this is most often not the case. The correlation between observation from the same neighbourhood (intra-class correlation) will mostly be stronger than the correlation between observations from different neighbourhoods (Rasbash et. al. 2004).

In the past, the problem with hierarchical structures was solved using aggregation or disaggregation. In our case that would mean that information of residents of a neighbourhood would be added together on the level of neighbourhoods, or that information of neighbourhoods would be assigned to the different inhabitants. However, this solution creates two problems. First of all, the researcher may come to invalid conclusions when he would analyse the data at one level, and postulate conclusion at another. In this way the researcher might make the ecological fallacy or the atomistic fallacy. A second problem is statistical. When data from a lower level are aggregated at a higher level, a lot of information is lost. But when data from a higher level are assigned to a lower level information is multiplied because there are more observations at the lower level than at the higher level. OLS-regression would consider all this information to be independent, resulting in far to small standard errors (and thus in accepting spurious relationships as real relationships). Therefore, multilevel regression modelling is used. This technique accounts for intra-class correlation by performing a regression on the regression coefficients. (Hox, 2002)

4.2 What is a neighbourhood? Defining relevant geographical units

In our present study, we are looking for the effect of a person's living environment on his social functioning. An evident difficulty that arises here, is how to define and operationalise the boundaries of such a geographical unit. Nevertheless, many studies investigating environmental influences on social connections pass over the issue in silence.

Scholars dedicating attention to the definition of a neighbourhood differ very much in their approaches and conceptualisations. This is not surprising, for these scholars come from a multitude of different disciplines and research fields (e.g. Chaskin 1995, Diez-Roux 2001, Dietz 2002, Moudon et. al. 2006, Coudeneys & Rammelaere 2006, Galster 2007). And even when they would agree on a definition, fixing the exact boundaries of an area remains a very difficult task. Researchers, often confronted with no better option, choose to use census tracks or another form of administrative division as operationalisations. When using fixed administrative areas for research, it is very useful to consider the criteria on which the boundaries of these areas have been decided. After all, some context-effects may disappear when they are measured in an area that is too small or too large, or that has too artificial frontiers. Checking whether the scale and boundaries of neighbourhoods used to study the effect under consideration is appropriate or

not, is of importance for everyone investigating neighbourhood effects (Galster 2007). In other words, we must look for "geographical areas whose characteristics may be relevant to specific [...] outcomes being studied" (Diez-Roux 2001, p.11).

In this paper, two different operationalisations of neighbourhoods are used. In the next chapter we describe the political and historical background of the classification in neighbourhoods and the criteria used to make the division. In this way, we get a better answer on our substantial research question.

5. METHODS

5.1 The survey

Data come from the Quality of Life-survey of the city of Ghent. The city uses the survey to monitor the general quality of life of the inhabitants and have a view on the differences between neighbourhoods. Information was gathered using a postal survey. In total 4946 inhabitants of Ghent where contacted, which resulted in 1673 valid surveys, a responsrate of 33.8%. (Vandekerckhove 2006)

5.2 Dependent variables

As we have mentioned earlier, the relationship between individual and society expresses itself in many different ways. Therefore, we use several indicators to identify this relationship: the Intensity of Social Relations, Socio-Cultural Participation, Club life, and Neighbourliness. The *Intensity of Social Relations* was measured asking individuals how often they meet with friends, relatives and neighbours. Socio-cultural participation measures the amount respondents take part in cultural and sport events, go out eating or visiting a restaurant, follow trainings or courses and go on an outing. Club life measures how many different clubs participants actively take part in. Finally, Neighbourliness combines questions on how much people like to live in the neighbourhood, are proud on their neighbourhood, etc.

Table 1: Reliability Analysis

Variable	*Chrohnbach's Alpha*
SCP	.626
Neighbourliness	.886
InSoRe	.420

Validity and Reliability where tested using Principal Components Analysis and Chrohnbach's Alpha Method respectively. Results can be find in tables 1 and 2. Alpha-coefficients where satisfying for SCP and Neighbourliness, but a bit low for InSoRe. However, better information on this (important) element of social connectedness was not at our disposition. Principal Components Analysis gave satisfying results. All scales only had one factor with an eigenvalue greater than 1. Loadings on the factor where mostly relatively high.

5.3 Independent variables

Five individual-level variables where used, namely Gender, Age, Nationality (migrant or Belgian), the amount of hours respondents watch television and self-rated health. One neighbourhood-level variable is used, namely the amount of basis facilities located in the neighbourhoods under investigation. With basic facilities we understand the kind of facilities people use in every-day life. In order to determine how much facilities were present, we asked the participants if they thought there were enough basic facilities (such as shops, banks, post offices, ...) in their neighbourhood. The respondents could answer on a scale from 1 to 5. Afterwards we calculated the average score per neighbourhood and brought this score in as a higher level-variable.

Table 2: Principal Components Analysis*

SCP	
Question	*Loading*
How often do you go to theathre, film, sportsevents or cultural events?	.751
How often do you visit a pub or go out eating?	.681
How often do you follow a course or training?	.604
How often do you make trips or outings?	.722
Neighbourliness	
Question	*Loading*
I wouldn't want to live somewhere else	.599
I am not planning to leave this neighbourhood	.680
I feel very well in this neighbourhood	.705
For me it is important to be living in exactly this neighbourhood	.622
In this neighbourhood a feel very much at home	.733
I am a bit proud on this neighbourhood	.673
InSoRe	
Question	*Loading*
How often do you meet with friends	.670
How often do you meet with family	.752
How often do you meet with neighbours	.638

* Varimax-rotation was used. Only factors with eigenvalues > 1 where maintained in the analysis.

5.4 The two operationalisations of neighbourhood

In our first analysis neighbourhoods are defined as statistical sectors. The statistical sectors where first defined in 1970 by the Belgian Institute for Statistics. The aim of the operation was to give the users of the information of the institute insight in the internal differences within the Belgian communes. A statistical sector is theoretically an area where services for daily needs are provided. This definition was most efective in the countryside, where small villages where determined as individual sectors. In the main agglomerations (such as Ghent), the internal division aimed first at defining neighbourhoods with a different economical en social structure. The creation of the different sectors was based on cartographic information, areal photographs

and knowledge of the own region. The borders of some of the sectors where adopted several times in order to keep up with the changing demographic, economic and social structure. The sectors are the smallest operationalisations of neighbourhoods used in this article. They have an average size of more or les 1100 inhabitants, with great differences going from less than 50 till almost 5000 inhabitants (Rousseau 1984, Jamagne 2004).

In the second analysis we use a delineation of Ghent into 25 neighbourhoods which is used by the city for the project *Gebiedsgerichte Werking* (Area-directed Action). The aim of the project is to enable the city to develop specific policies for different parts of the city and to enable inhabitants of those neighbourhoods to participate more directly into the policy of their neighbourhood. To realise this aims, the city gathers all kinds of information about this neighbourhoods and develops action plans for the different neighbourhoods. The borders of these neighbourhoods where drawn by the staf of the city. They primarily based themselves on the impression they had about what the people of Ghent identified as the different neighbourhoods of their cities. As a consequence, criteria are not very objective, but the division should be in line with the feelings of the Ghent population. These neighbourhoods are much bigger than the statistical sectors. They have an average size of proximally 9100 inhabitants. Information on the differences in population between the respective neighbourhoods is not at our disposition[4].

6. ANALYSIS

In tables 1A till 2B we show the results of our analysis. We will first discuss the results of the analysis for of the models based on the sectors, followed by the results of the analysis based on the 25 neighbourhoods. Afterwards, we will discuss the differences that appear with the results of the neighbourhoods-models.

6.1 The sectors-models

For the variable *Neighbourliness*, we see that 4.34% of the variance is situated at the neighbourhood level. The second-level variance is significant, witch means neighbourhoods have a significant influence on the amount of Neighbourliness of its inhabitants. When we bring the individual-level variables in the model, nearly half of the variance at neighbourhood level disappears. This means that half of the differences between neighbourhoods can be accounted for by the differences between the people living in them. The variance remaining at neighbourhood level still is significant however. The characteristics of people significantly influencing neighbourliness are *Age*, *TV-viewing* and *Self-reported health*. In our third model we investigate if the neighbourhood variance can be accounted for by the amount of facilities present in that neighbourhood. As we can see in table 1A, the coefficient is not significant. There is also nearly no descent in VPC. This means that the amount of facilities present in neighbourhoods can not explain differences in Neighbourliness between neighbourhoods.

[4] Most information concerning the 25 neighbourhoods was directly gathered from the staff of the city responsible for the construction of the neighbourhoods. Some information can be fined in anon. (2007) and anon. (2008).

Table 3A: Multilevel-models based on 158 statistical sectors

Independent = SCP

Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	β	p	β	p	β	p
intercept	**5,909*** **	0,000	**7,324*** **	0,000	**6,924*** **	0,000
Women			0,136	0,178	0,133	0,190
Age			**- 0,017*** **	0,000	**- 0,017*** **	0,000
Migrant			- 0,215	0,400	- 0,220	0,390
TV			**- 0,427*** **	0,000	**- 0,426*** **	0,000
Health			**0,316*** **	0,000	**0,315*** **	0,000
Facilities					0,132	0,318
σ^2_{u0}	**0,211** **	0,004	**0,117***	0,034	**0,115***	0,034
VPC	4,34%		2,89%		2,84%	

Independent = Neighbourliness

Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	β	p	β	p	β	p
intercept	**5,891*** **	0,000	**4,292*** **	0,000	**6,282*** **	0,000
Women			0,118	0,262	0,119	0,129
Age			**0,021*** **	0,000	**0,021*** **	0,000
Migrant			- 0,475	0,070	- 0,473	0,072
TV			0,079	0,076	**0,078***	0,040
Health			**0,140***	0,026	**0,140***	0,026
Facilities					- 0,099	0,532
σ^2_{u0}	**0,470*** **	0,000	**0,427*** **	0,000	**0,423*** **	0,000
VPC	10,55%		10,55%		10,00%	

Table 3B: Multilevel-model based on 158 statistical sectors

Independent = InSoRe

Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	β	p	β	p	β	p
intercept	**7,137*** **	0,000	**7,405*** **	0,000		
Women			- 0,008	0,928		
Age			**0,009***	0,002		
Migrant			**- 0,557***	0,014		
TV			0,012	0,353		
Health			0,049	0,098		
Facilities						
σ^2_{u0}	0,071	0,136	0,059	0,120		
VPC	2,29%		1,90%			

Independent = Clublife

Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	β	p	β	p	β	p
intercept	**0,975*** **	0,000	**1,173*** **	0,000		
Women			0,050	0,362		
Age			0,001	0,616		
Migrant			- 0,101	0,458		
TV			**- 0,079*** **	0,000		
Health			0,011	0,742		
Facilities						
σ^2_{u0}	0,013	0,139	0,002	0,856		
VPC	1,05%		0,16%			

Table 4A: Multilevel-models based on the 25 neighbourhoods

Independent = SCP

Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	β	p	β	p	β	p
intercept	**5,858*** **	0,000	**7,258*** **	0,000	**6,210*** **	0,000
Women			0,142	0,162	0,139	0,164
Age			**- 0,017*** **	0,000	**- 0,017*** **	0,000
Migrant			- 0,264	0,304	- 0,261	0,304
TV			**- 0,418*** **	0,000	**- 0,415*** **	0,000
Health			**0,315*** **	0,000	**0,316*** **	0,000
Facilities					0,362	0,072
σ^2_{u0}	**0,175***	0,016	**0,106***	0,034	**0,093***	0,044
VPC	3,60%		2,62%		2,31%	

Independent = Neighbourliness

Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	β	p	β	p	β	p
intercept	**5,713*** **	0,000	**4,052*** **	0,000	**9,940*** **	0,000
Women			0,113	0,282	0,115	0,272
Age			**0,022*** **	0,000	**0,022*** **	0,000
Migrant			- 0,342	0,192	- 0,344	0,194
TV			**0,090** **	0,018	**0,088** **	0,020
Health			**0,143** **	0,026	**0,142** **	0,028
Facilities					- 0,313	0,298
σ^2_{u0}	**0,369** **	0,004	**0,330** **	0,008	**0,316** **	0,006
VPC	8,20%		7,72%		7,42%	

Table 4B: Multilevel models based on 25 neighbourhoods

Independent = InSoRe

Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	β	p	β	p	β	p
intercept	**7,147*** **	0,000	**7,419*** **	0,000		
Women			- 0,011	0,902		
Age			**- 0,010*** **	0,000		
Migrant			**- 0,536***	0,018		
TV			0,011	0,732		
Health			0,051	0,346		
Facilities						
σ^2_{u0}	0,022	0,312	0,016	0,374		
VPC	0,71%		0,52%			

Independent = Clublife

Variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	β	p	β	p	β	p
intercept	**0,967*** **	0,000	**1,170*** **	0,000		
Women			0,049	0,228		
Age			0,000	1,000		
Migrant			- 0,079	0,560		
TV			**- 0,074*** **	0,000		
Health			0,009	0,444		
Facilities						
σ^2_{u0}	0,017	0,090	0,013	0,300		
VPC	7,37%		1,06%			

For the *Socio-cultural participation* (SCP) we see that as much as 10.55% of the variance is situated at the neighbourhood level. This variance is highly significant. The addition of the individual-level control variables does not explain that variance at the higher level. Significant individual-level variables are *Age* and *Health*. In the third model TV-viewing becomes significant. Although there is a high amount of neighbourhood-level variance, the presence of facilities can not explain this variance (the coefficient is insignificant).

For the variables *Intensity of social relations* (InSoRe) and *Clublife* we can not identify any significant influence of the neighbourhood-level. We therefore did not perform a multilevel analysis for these variables. InSoRe and Cublife are respectively influenced by *Age* and *Nationality* and by *TV-Viewing*.

To sum up, the influence of the neighbourhood on the different forms of social connectedness taken under consideration in this paper, is relatively small. An important exception however is neighbourliness: the attachment of people to their neighbourhood is, not surprisingly, more strongly influenced by the neighbourhood itself. Still, the variability in the indicators of social connectedness can not be explained by the availability of facilities in the neighbourhood.

Though we can not identify neighbourhood-level causes of connectedness, we can draw some conclusions on the individual-level causes. Age seems to have a negative influence on socio-cultural participation, but a positive one on intensity of social relations and attachment to the neighbourhood. Older people obviously go out less, but are more attached to their neighbourhood and have more intense relationships with their family, friends and neighbours. Migrants have less intense social relations than have Belgians. For the interpretation of this result, we must go back to the operationalisation of *Nationality*. Only people with a foreign nationality are considered migrants. But in Belgian most migrants of the first generation who live in the country for a longer time, and definitely migrants of the second, third and fourth generation mostly have the Belgian nationality. People with a foreign nationality typically have been in the country for a smaller period, and therefore haven't got the time to build up a large social network. Very often their family still lives abroad, so relations with them are certainly less frequent. TV-viewing has a negative influence on SCP and Clublife. Clearly the amount of time people spent on watching TV competes with the amount of time they can spent on other, more social, leisure activities (cfr. Putnam 2000). Self-rated health has a positive influence on socio-cultural participation and neighbourliness. It seems logical that healthy people participate more often than unhealthy people. The influence on neighbourliness is less clear. Maybe people who perceive their health as being inferior feel bad in general through witch their perception of all kinds of things, for instance their neighbourhood, becomes more negative.

6.2 Differences with the 25 neighbourhoods-models

For SCP, the differences that appear between the two models are very small. There is slightly less variability at the neighbourhood level, but the same variables are significant as is the case in the sectors-model. The same counts for Neighbourliness, though here TV-viewing is significant in both the second and the third model. Also the introduction of individual level variables takes away more variability at the second level than is the case in the sectors-model. Here it seems

that the sectors-model is a more appropriate choice to analyse neighbourliness in comparison with the 25-neighbourhoods model.

7. DISCUSSION

At the start of this paper we stressed the importance researchers and policy makers have attached to social connectedness in the latest two decades. This interest can be traced back in the literature about social capital and social inclusion. After reconstructing some of the points of discussion surrounding these concepts, we highlighted our own stand in the debate. However, the central aim of this paper was not theoretical, but empirical. We wanted to check whether neighbourhoods can account for some of the differences in social connectedness and if these differences could be explained by the availability of facilities in people's living environment. As our results show, this is only the case for some of the dimensions of the concept, i.e. neighbourliness and SCP. Not in a single case these differences could be explained by the amount of facilities present in the neighbourhood. As we can see, for most of the indicators individual-level variables are of much more importance for the explanation of the phenomenon. The possibility for governments to influence social connectedness trough the adaptation of the living environment seems very small. Possibly, (local) authorities should focus more on target-group specific policies in order to have an influence on connectedness. In turn, researchers should probably focus more on what brings certain subgroups to have higher or lower levels of social connectedness than others.

In our definition and operationalisation of social connectedness, we assumed the concept to be multidimensional. The results of our analysis seems to confirm this assumption, for the distinct dimensions that are investigated seem to be influenced differently by the independent variables in our model. TV-viewing, for instance, has an important negative influence on socio-cultural participation and Club life, but a positive one on neighbourliness. Being a migrant seems to negatively influence the intensity of social relations, but not the other aspects of connectedness. Fully understanding social connectedness means that all the different dimensions need to be considered separately.

Finally, in our paper we addressed the difficulties of operationalising geographical units. Following the advice of Galster (2007), we used two distinct operationalisations of neighbourhoods in our analysis in order to have a greater understanding about our research question. Our findings show that the different operationalisations here only marginally influence the results. In this example clearly the choice between the neighbourhoods does not make much difference: both in the sectors-model, as in the neighbourhoods-model our main conclusions are the same. But does this mean not much attention should be paid to the choices made how to determine the borders of neighbourhoods? We are convinced that would be a false conclusion. The neighbourhood-level variance of the independents is very low, except for neighbourliness. And exactely for that variable we see more differences between the two models. Probably, the higher the influence of the neighbourhood on the independent variable, the more important the choice between two operationalisations. Trying different operationalisations is always a good thing. Even in our case, where we come to the same conclusion in both cases, we are more sure

this conclusion is not purely influenced by our choice how to define the neighbourhoods under investigation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abrahamson, P. (2006), Social Exclusion and Inclusion. In: Patrick, T. F., et. al. (eds.), International Encyclopedia of Social Policy. New York, Routledge, pp.1250-1254.

Anon. (2007), Gent in cijfers 2007. Een omgevingsanalyse. Ghent: Departement stafdiensten / Dataplanning en monitoring.

Anon. (2008), Gebiedsgerichte werking. Algemeen. Publication on the website of the city of Ghent, http://www.gent.be/eCache/WBS/1/16/348.html.

Booth, M. L., et. al. (2000), Social-cognitive and perceived environmental influences associated with physical activity in older Australians. In: Preventive Medecine, vol. 31, pp. 15-22.

Bourdieu, P. (1980), Le Capital Social: notes provisoires. In: Actes de la recherché en sciences sociales, vol. 31, issues 2-3.

Bourdieu, P. (1986), The forms of Capital. In: Richardson, J.G. (ed.), Handbook of theory and research. New York: Greenwood Press, pp. 241-258.

Bowling, A. & Stafford, M. (2007), How do objective and subjective assessments of neighbourhood influence social and physical functioning in older age? Findings from a British survey of ageing. In: Social Science & Medecine, vol. 64, pp.2533-2549.

Cattell, V. (2001), Poor people, poor places, and poor health: the mediating role of social networks and social capital. In: Social Science & Medecine, vol. 52, pp. 1501-1516.

Chaskin, R. J. (1995), Defining Neighborhood: History, Theory and Practice. Chicago: The Chapin Hall Center for Children at the University of Chicago.

Coffé, H. & Geys, B. (2006), Sociaal kapitaal in heterogene gemeenten. Een studie naar de realtie tussen een heterogene bevolkingssamenstelling en het social kaptiaal in Vlaamse gemeenten. In: Tijdschrift voor sociologie, vol. 27, nr. 1.

Cohen, J., et. al. (2003), Applied Multiple Regression/Correlation Analysis for the Behavioral Sciences. Third Edition. Londen: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Cohen, A. D., et. al. (2007), Public parks and physical activity among adolescent girls. In: Pediatrics, vol. 118, pp. 1381-1389.

Coleman, J. (1988), Social capital in the creation of human capital. In: American journal of sociology, vol. 94, pp. 95-120.

Coleman, J. (1990), Foundations of social theory. Cambridge: The Belknap Press.

Coudenys, H. & Rammelaere, S., (2006), Draaiboek vergelijkend wijkenonderzoek. Een leefbaarheidsanalyse op wijkniveau. Brugge: Steunpunt Sociale Planning – Provincie West-Vlaanderen.

Decoster, K. (2001), Implicaties van een sociaal kapitaal-concept voor politieke sociologen. In: PSW-paper, issue 5, Faculty of Political and Social Sciences, Antwerp University.

Dietz, R. D. (2002), The estimantion of neighbourhood effects in the social sciences: An interdisciplinary approach. In: Social Science Research, vol. 31, pp. 539-575.

Diez-Roux, A. V. (2001), Investigating Neighborhood and Area Effects on Health. In: American Journal of Public Health, vol. 91, nr. 11, pp. 1783-1789.

Fukuyama, F. (1995), Trust: the social virtues and the creation of prosperity. New York: Free Press.

Galster, G. (2007), Quantifying the Effect of Neighbourhood on Human Behaviour. Paper presented at the conference “Neighbourhood effects studies on the basis of European micro-data” at the Humboldt University of Berlin.

Hart, J. de & Dekker, P. (2003), A tale of two cities: Local patterns of social capital. In: Hooghe, M. & Stolle, D. (2003), Generating Social Capital. Civil society and institutions in comparative perspective. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 153-170.

Hooghe, M. (1999), Culturele en Maatschappelijke kenmerken en het participatieniveau van de Vlaamse bevolking. Een analyse van cross sectionele data. In: Tijdschrift voor sociologie, vol.20, nr. 3-4, pp.333-366.

Hooghe, M. (2000), Sociaal kapitaal in Vlaanderen. Verenigingen en democratische politieke cultuur. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Hox, J. (2002), Multilevel Analysis. Techniques and Applications. London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Jakobs, D., et. al. (2001), Verklaringen voor etnocentrisme. De rol van sociaal kapitaal, sociaal-economische onzekerheid, sociale integratrie en gevoelens van discriminatie. Een verkenning. In: Vlaanderen gepeild! De Vlaamse overheid en burgeronderzoek 2001. Brussels: Ministry of the Flemish Community.

Jamagne, P. (2004), Actualisering van de statistische sectoren. Voorlopige Versie. Unpublished internal document of the Belgian Institute for Statistics.

Latkin, C. A. & Curry, A.D., Stressful Neighborhoods and Depression: A Prospective Study of the Impact of Neighborhood Disorder. In: Journal of Health and Social Behavior, vol. 44, nr.1, pp. 34-44.

Levitas, R. (2006), The concept and measurement of social exclusion. In: Pantazis, C. et. al., Poverty and social exclusion in Britain. The millenium survey. Bristol, The Policy Press, pp. 123-160.

Lindström, M. (2006), Psychosocial work conditions, social participation and capital: A causal pathway investigated in a longitudinal study. In: Social Science & Medecine, vol. 62, pp.280-291.

Moudon, A. V., et. al. (2006), Operational Definitions of Walkable Neighborhood: Theoretical and Empirical Insights. In: Journal of Physical Activity and Health 2006., vol. R., nr. 1, pp.99-117.

Narayan (1999), Bonds and Bridges: Social Capital And Poverty. World Bank Poverty Group Working Paper. Published on the website of the World Bank: http://info.worldbank.org/etools/docs/library/9747/narayan.pdf.

Newton, K. (1999), Social capital and democracy in modern Europe. In: Van Deth, J. W., et. al. (eds.), Social capital and European Democracy. London: Routledge, pp. 3-24.

Nieminen, T., et. al. (2008), Measurement and socio-demographic variantion of social capital in a large population-based survey. In: Social Indicators Research, vol. 85, pp. 405-423.

Portes, A. (1998), Social Capital: Its origins and application in modern sociology. In: Annual Review of Sociology, vol. 24, pp. 1-24.

Putnam, R. (1993), Making Democracy Work. Civic traditions in modern Italy. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Putnam, R. (1995), Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital. In: Journal of Democracy, vol. 6, nr. 1, pp.65-78.

Putnam, R. (2000), Bowling Alone: Collapse and revival of American community. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Rasbash, J., et. al. (2004), A User's Guide to MLwiN. Version 2.0. Published on the website of the Centre for Multilevel Modelling, http://www.cmm.bristol.ac.uk/MLwiN/download/manuals.shtml.

Rousseau, S. (1984), Indeling van de gemeenten in Statistische sectoren/buurten van de algemene volkstelling van 1981. In: Statistische Studiën, nr. 72, pp. 39-53.

Silver, H. (2007), Social Exclusion. In: Ritzer, G., The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology. Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, volume 9, pp. 4411-4413.

Stolle, D. (1999), Onderzoek naar sociaal kapitaal. Naar een attitudinale benadering. In: Tijdschrift voor sociologie, vol. 20, nr.3-4, pp. 247-280.

Timpone, R. (1998). Ties That Bind: A Behavioral Measure of Social Connectedness. In: Political Behavior, vol. 20, nr. 53-77.

Van Deth, J. W. (1992), De politieke betekenis van maatschappelijke participatie. In: Acta Politica, vol. 27, nr.4, pp. 28-53.

Vandekerckhove, B. (2006), Leefbaarheidsonderzoek bij de inwoners van de verschillende wijken van de stad Gent, aan de hand van een leefbaarheidsmonitor. 2de editie. Eindrapport. Brussel: Sum Research.

Verlet, D. & Devos, C. (forthcomming), The main determinants for subjective well-being: a quest for the Holy Grail? Can local governments enhance the perceived quality of life? In: Social Indicators Research.

Vézina, M., et. al. (2004), The impact of job strain on social isolation: a longitudinal analysis of French workers. In: Social Science & Medecine, vol. 59, pp.29-38.

Witten, K., et. al. (2001), The impacts of a school closure on neighbourhood social cohesion: narratives from Invercargill, New Zealand. In: Health & Place, vol. 7, pp.307-317.

Woolcock, M. (1998), Social Capital and Economic Development: Toward a Theoretical Synthesis and Policy Framework. In: Theory and Society, vol. 27, pp. 151-208.